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AN OPEN LETTER

TO

THE MEMBERS OF THE

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AN OPEN LETTER

TO

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CHICAGO



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All tendency on the part of public authorities to stretch their interference, and assume a power of any sort which can be easily dispensed with, should be regarded with unremitting jealousy. Perhaps this is even more important in a democracy than in any other form of political society. (Mill on Political Economy, Book 5, Chapter 11, Section 3.)

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB OF CHICAGO:

The people of Chicago are at the parting of the ways. Do we understand the question? Are we going it blindly, or do we deliberately make our choice? Municipal Ownership of intramural transportation is a socialistic proposition, enthusiastically supported by socialists as the beginning of their triumph, and adopted by many others as an apparently wise solution of the traction problem.

Individual liberty unfettered by governmental restraint is one of the achievements of Anglo-Saxon civilization. The right of the individual to follow out his own bent and pursue his own lawful activities in his own unrestrained way is a heritage from our forefathers we should not carelessly surrender.

Socialism is opposed to individual liberty. It assails modern civilization, belittles all its triumphs and calls it a failure. It exaggerates the manifold ills of life caused by the defects of our human nature, and as a remedy offers a scheme subversive of industrial life whereby men are expected to take on a new nature and thereafter all live unselfishly and happily together.

I distrust the doctor who has a panacea for bodily ills. I distrust the reformer who has a new and revolutionary scheme for government. I distrust a short cut easy road to any kind of happiness. Civilization with its ideas of individual liberty has been a growth, an evolution. Those who try to force the Millennium on society (a society which would not enjoy the Millennium because unfitted for it), are in danger of doing much mischief by disturbing the orderly development of progressive liberty.

The government of a despotic monarchy resembles a socialistic republic. In each the individual is minimized, and the government magnified. In the latter it is the despotism of the majority who claim to act for the benefit of all; in the former it is that of a ruler and his associates who likewise claim to be acting for the benefit of the individual. Each assumes that the individual must not be left to work out his own career, but must labor on lines laid down by others.

Anarchy and socialism are terms used carelessly as identical. Anarchism is a paradox—as a system it is incomprehensible. Some dreamers, who imagine they are thinking, talk of anarchy as an ideal state where every man does as to him seemeth best. Their ignorant followers in their rage at the society which they deem the cause of their troubles, become wild beasts and assail those who stand for that society. For this was McKinley murdered.

Theoretically, socialism and anarchism are at opposite poles. But many socialists, disappointed with the slow acceptance of their views, drift into practical anarchy, and hope that on the breaking up of civilized society, there will be resolved a community where selfishness is lost and where each will cheerfully work his best for the State.

The true socialist is a philanthropist gone wrong. He ignores history and human nature. We admire his good heart, but deplore his judgment.

Our government is based on the development of Anglo-Saxon liberty—the fullest freedom for the individual consistent with the rights of others.

Although we have an ideal government in theory, in practice it falls short. Many attribute its defects to the abuses of universal suffrage whereby the ignorant and vicious are allowed too much influence.

It is not the function of this paper to cover too broad a ground, or open up too many topics. It is enough for the present to admit that which requires no admission because patent to all,—that the legislative and administrative functions are full of imperfections. To a certain extent so are all governments, but we who aim so high should be more zealous to show better results!

These imperfections are based on greed (so are most of the wrongs of society). Every vice is based on some elemental virtue gone to an extremity which interferes with the rights of others. It is the function of every government to restrain such excesses.

Our government calls on every citizen to aid in its administration, but the cares and duties of life so benumb the sensibilities that the vast multitude is deaf to the daily calls of public duty, and allows abuses to grow that become intolerable.

No republic can be reformed from the outside, or by a nostrum forced on the thoughtless public by a few zealots. Reforms come by the awakening of the people, the arousing of the public conscience which follows the stirring of the individual conscience. It is not so attractive or fascinating as to reform Society by a

beautifully wrought scheme, as an artist paints a picture, making the conditions to suit himself.

The evolution of economies in production and distribution have created those enormous industrial trusts so-called, and many tremble when they think where they may lead. Each epoch has had its problems to solve and the undue influence of aggregated wealth is of the present. Let us not lose our heads because we do not fully see the present remedy. Our best talent and patriotic endeavor are now concerned in its solution. When the people see an evil they always find the remedy. Deliberation, however, is especially essential, for that which is done hastily is rarely done wisely and well.

Patriotism is not, however, dead, nor has wisdom fled our borders. And what reasonable man can doubt that the solution will be wise and reasonably speedy?

But the socialists look with favor on those industrial trusts! They regard them as hastening the day when they all will become vested in one body and then the government will take them over! They look at Government as one enormous Industrial Trust or Labor Union!

It has been said, Socialism has as many definitions as the word *religion*—ten thousand. A local event of passing importance has furnished us a local definition of its objects.

Young Patterson lately on resigning his position as Commissioner of Public Works, and while proclaiming himself as a convert to socialism, admits "Municipal Ownership is only skin deep socialism. I'm for the real brand, *public ownership of all sources of wealth.*"

We are indebted to Mr. Patterson for calling our attention to the undisguised purposes of socialism in Chicago. Later he em-

phasized it by signing the pledge of those who enter the fold of the Socialistic Party. It is in the following words:

"I the undersigned, recognizing the necessity of the organization of a working class political party, for the purpose of *capturing the powers of government* in the interest of the working class, with the aim of transforming all means of production and distribution from private to collective ownership, and distinct from and opposed to all parties who stand for the maintenance of the competitive system, hereby declare that I have severed my relations with all other parties, that I endorse the platform and constitution of the Socialist Party, and hereby apply for admission to membership in said party."

The entering wedge of the Socialistic dogma is the capturing of the public utilities of the city. Our own traction problem with its many complications—the unwise concessions obtained, as is generally believed, by the occasional bribery of the legislature and the constant bribery of the Common Council in the not remote past, and the indignation now really felt at these outrages, are seized upon by the socialist as the opportunity of his life.

Socialistic clubs sometimes disguised under the flag of municipal ownership pure and simple, are working day and night for their cause. Shall the conservative men allow the matter to be settled by default?

Let us consider the practicability of municipal ownership,

Before augmenting the power of the city government by adding to the pay-roll many thousand voters, expending in the purchase and equipment from seventy millions to a possible hundred millions, we should consider what that government is.

The Municipal Voters' League was formed, because of the despair which prevailed at obtaining any improvement in the Common Council, by help from any political organization, it having become a matter of notoriety that the Council was openly corrupt. It was a matter of common notoriety that there were but a few among the members of the Council who were above suspicion and who would not engage in any corrupt deal for his own profit. The League undertook to expose the record and warn the voters of the character of the candidates. Laboring under great difficulty, accused of being busy-bodies, offensively interfering with political government, etc., it accomplished a wonderful change. Decent men no longer are afraid to become candidates and the number of the baser element has become much reduced. We are still far from perfection and it will be only after many years of continued effort and the continual agitation for arousing the public zeal that the Council will be free from reproach. On a smaller scale, grafting, stuffed payrolls, and incompetence still find their abode in the city hall.

Civil Service reform in national as well as local affairs has accomplished much, but it is still obstructed in its ameliorating efforts by public apathy and the open hostility of unworthy and narrow-minded politicians.

The city government has many functions to perform. It disburses annually about forty millions—it employs directly over seventeen thousand persons. It has its police, fire department, water department, public schools, hospitals, parks, municipal courts and subordinate functions. Over all the slimy trail of politics is found. In spite of the improvement in some directions we have our daily murder and our hourly robbery! Are we satisfied with any of its departments?

The primary function of a government is to protect the person and property of its citizens. So gross has been the dereliction of our city in these primary duties, not to mention the thousand minor ills, that it has become a national disgrace!

To add so enormously to the powers of this city would be a reversal of the parable of the ten talents.

Should we not first have a model city before we enlarge its duties?

Glasgow and many foreign cities own their traction lines. They say it works well there, therefore let us try it here, they argue.

Long before the first street railroad rail was laid, the government of every one of those cities was pure compared with ours. It is with them mainly a question of weighing economic advantages, and it is still a mooted question among experts, whether public or private ownership is better. Whether that decision be *pro* or *con* will not help us. Dalrymple, the Glasgow expert brought here to advise us, thinks it won't do for us, because of our defects—too much political corruption.

Politics has little to do with the administration of those cities. Mayors are elected for their prominence and efficiency in municipal duties, not because of political leadership. Aldermen are selected because they are respectable business men and take pride in their office. Whoever heard abroad of a lot of keepers of low dives and saloons becoming aldermen? We are so used to this that we now fail to notice it.

The defects of our traction service before the controversy between the city and the companies arose, was not so irritatingly

bad as since, and those defects are traceable to the neglect of authorities in applying remedies which lay at their hands. We only needed intelligence combined with honesty in the Common Council. The history of these companies in their dealings with the government is full of scandal. The public has now become so educated in that direction there is but little fear that they will be repeated—no new traction boss dare do it if so disposed. The Public is watching them.

The socialist, however, states it is important for the protection of the community from future bribery by such companies, that the temptation should be abolished by taking over the companies and so removing the tempter from the field.

Let us consider this proposition. Because corporate wealth has been used to corrupt the government, abolish the corporation. To carry this out we should adopt young Patterson's notion, "Public ownership of all sources of wealth."

This is a cowardly way to escape responsibility of public duties. We have a right to demand better service from the municipality in every line, *and we will have it*. Because the owners of wealth use it for corrupt purposes, shall we abolish the wealth? Shall we rage against the inert and unintelligent instrument and let off the corrupt user? Rather let us put our house in order and keep it so.

The present question, however, for the voter is not, how to improve the council, but how to get better traction service. Even during the height of traction scandals, thanks, as before said, to the Municipal Voters' League, the purchase of franchises became impossible and the Council is yearly growing better. As a balancing of temptations to the authorities which the choice presents it seems patent that the mere regulation of the companies

is vastly easier and safer and involving less facilities for corrupt politics than would be afforded by the exercise of the powers of ownership, which includes the operation of hundreds of miles of track, requiring the expenditure of millions, under hundreds or perhaps thousands of contracts creating a paradise for grafters, the extension of lines demanded by political bosses and land speculators, the employment of an army of conductors, and others whose votes would be under the control of the party in power.

Professor James Mavor, of the University of Toronto, has expressed so admirably in a condensed form the danger of municipal ownership in a paper before the Michigan Political Science Association, at a meeting held at Ann Arbor February 11-12, 1904, that the following extract is here presented:

"The adoption of municipal ownership causes, for so much as it amounts to, an increase in the public finances. It produces an increase of the area of governmental or compulsory finance, and correspondingly diminishes the area of private finance. In the event of ownership being accompanied by net pecuniary loss, that loss will require to be met by taxation, that is, by a compulsory contribution to the public powers from the private pocket. Moreover, in diminishing, as it must, the area of possible action by private initiative, as indicated above, it tends to destroy private initiative and to produce a state of the public mind in which the community is regarded as a universal provider. This state of mind is up to a certain point inevitable in countries where the accumulation of private capital proceeds slowly, and where enterprises that seem indispensable to municipal progress are undertaken by compulsory action, because private initiative does not exist on an adequate scale; but it is a dangerous state of mind to cultivate. It tends almost inevitably toward petty political chicanery, and to the wholesale purchase of constituencies by the party in power. It is not realized that every draft upon the public purse is sooner or later a draft upon the private purse of the citizens. There are numerous instances of municipalities being urged by enthusiasts into undertakings which have been burdens to them, even although some benefits may have accrued. There are, for example, the case of Cincinnati and the Southern Railway, Baltimore and the Western Maryland, the small city of Wheeling and its railway bonds, and Philadelphia and its gas works. It was assumed that the enterprises were necessary. Private enterprise was at the time too feeble, and under pressure of

The complication which the expiring Charter presents will be resolved in due time, and in a manner satisfactory to the people, if not to the present company. We have wasted a lot of precious time trifling with the impossible Municipal Ownership. Let us get down to business. The Supreme Court of the United States has just decided against the ninety-nine year claim and the solution is thereby much simpler.

It is generally conceded, although disputed by socialists, that the incentive of individual advantage secures better results than governmental workmanship. Government work is done more expensively than that done by private enterprise. This is easily shown by comparing the delay and expense of our court houses and public buildings with those constructed for private owners.

Some functions from their nature require public management whatever the expense. Postoffices, the world over, are public affairs—yet experts declare that better service at less expense could be obtained by contract. The work involves international exchanges which governments only could effect.

It is impossible to draw a hard and fast distinction between what the government should or should not do—but let us adhere

enthusiasts the public found itself impelled to enter upon them. So also institutions which in well-established communities are supported by private endowment or subscription—as hospitals, refuges and the like—are less well-established communities wholly or partially provided out of the tax revenue. There is a widespread illusion that the quickest and easiest, though in the long run it is the most expensive way, to have any improvement effected, is for the public authority to do it. This course appears to cost nobody anything.

“The practice of drawing on the public authority for money and services, probably in the beginning necessary, becomes a fixed passion, and the public purse comes to be looked upon as a pocket from which inexhaustible supplies are to be drawn.”

to the proposition of having the government do as little as possible. In other words, take the opposite position from that occupied by the Socialist.

The matter of economy, however, is not what the socialist is after. It is the principle he wants. To make converts he will insist that the municipality will do the work of furnishing public service of all kinds cheaper and better than can be done by others.

Extortionate and unreasonable concessions have been made in the tying up of the people for unlimited time to paying unjust rates for public utilities. The Supreme Court of the United States, as well as that of many states, have declared that all such contracts may be revised, and reasonable rates only exacted. It is only within a few years that we have commenced to call down the various local companies for extortion. If we lie down under abuses, we must blame ourselves.

We are now entering upon a new era in which quasi-public corporations will be required to make fair terms and live up to their contracts. Let us not spoil it by embarking on visionary experiments.

TO RECAPITULATE.

Socialism is a dangerous menace to our institutions, and a retrogression of our civilization. It is destructive of individual ambition. In so far as municipal ownership of public utilities is the beginning of socialism, let it be combated. Locally, we are unfit for any expansion of our city powers. Purification should precede expansion.

SIDNEY CORNING EASTMAN.



